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### Opening Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman Chairman, Committee on Energy and Commerce

### The Climate Crisis: National Security, Public Health, and Economic Threats February 12, 2009

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for calling today's important hearing.

As the Energy and Commerce Committee develops legislation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, we will spend a considerable amount of time examining the potential costs of different approaches.

Detailed government analyses and other assessments will project the possible effects of various proposals on electricity rates, gas prices, economic growth, and a host of other indicators.

But all of these analyses have a critical flaw. They compare a future in which we reduce greenhouse gas emissions to a world that will never exist — a world where we neither reduce greenhouse gas emissions nor suffer the ill effects of climate change.

At today's hearing, we will consider a different set of costs — the costs of inaction — and the impact of these costs on our national security, public health, and the global economy.

With global warming come rising sea levels, severe droughts, increasingly intense storms, forest die-offs and more frequent fires, and the loss of agricultural land. These effects harm people, and they impose huge costs on the economy.

Human health will also suffer, even if we make significant improvements to our public health systems.

For example, as heat waves increase in frequency and severity, more people will get sick and more people will die from heat-related illnesses.

As we saw with Hurricane Katrina, extreme weather events are harder on the sick than on the healthy, and they cause additional health problems.

With these and many other effects of global warming, the most vulnerable among us will be the hardest hit. This alone is reason to act.

But when military experts examine global warming, they see additional costs that also demand action. In 2007, a board of 11 retired admirals and generals reviewed the risks from climate change around the globe.

Some of these retired military officials had not viewed climate change as a threat prior to this review. But based on their review, the entire board came to this conclusion: "Climate change acts as a threat multiplier for instability in some of the most volatile regions of the world."

They warned of "large populations mov[ing] in search of resources" and "weakened and failing governments," which would "foster conditions for internal conflicts, extremism, and movement toward increased authoritarianism and radical ideologies."

Retired General Anthony Zinni, former Commander-in-Chief of U.S. Central Command, put it this way:

"We will pay for [climate change] one way or another. ... We will pay to reduce greenhouse gas emission today. ... Or we will pay the price later in military terms. And that will involve human lives. There will be a human toll. ... There is no way out of this that does not have real costs attached to it. That has to hit home."

I look forward to exploring these issues further with today's witnesses, and I also look forward to working with you, Mr. Chairman, and all the members of our Committee, as we develop legislation over the coming months.